

DEPUTY FISCAL OR DISBURSING AGENTS OF DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE OUTSIDE OF WASHINGTON

FEBRUARY 23, 1925.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the
state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. HAUGEN, from the Committee on Agriculture, submitted the
following

REPORT

To accompany S. 3018]

The Committee on Agriculture, to whom was referred the bill
(S. 3018) to authorize the designation of deputy fiscal or disbursing
agents in the Department of Agriculture stationed outside of
Washington, having considered the same, report thereon with a
recommendation that it do pass.

There is printed as follows a letter from the Secretary of Agri-
culture proposing this legislation:

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
Washington, March 28, 1924.

HON. GILBERT N. HAUGEN,
*Chairman Committee on Agriculture,
House of Representatives.*

DEAR MR. HAUGEN: I transmit herewith the draft of a proposed bill "To
authorize the designation of deputy fiscal or disbursing agents in the Department
of Agriculture stationed outside of Washington." The purpose of this legisla-
tion and the need for its enactment are briefly set forth below.

Because of the wide dispersal of the activities of the Department of Agriculture
throughout the continental United States and its outlying possessions it has long
been the custom to maintain a number of field fiscal or disbursing agents in order
to facilitate the department's business. Certain of these disbursing officers, par-
ticularly the fiscal agents of the Forest Service stationed at its various western
district headquarters and the special disbursing agent of the office of experiment
stations at Sitka, Alaska, have each designated a deputy to sign checks for and
in the name of the disbursing officer, under power of attorney given by the dis-
bursing officer as principal and under stipulation and consent agreement with
the bonding company acting as the surety of the principal. In each case the
action of the disbursing officer in designating such deputy has been specifically
approved in writing by the Secretary of Agriculture, and the power of attorney,
together with the bonding company's agreement, has been filed in the Treasury
Department.

The appointment of these deputies was brought about by the exigencies of the
service which could not otherwise be met. For example, the deputy at Sitka,

Alaska, was appointed because the special disbursing agent, who is also director of the Alaska experiment stations, is frequently required to be absent from his headquarters on official business for periods of several months. Likewise, in the cases of the seven fiscal agents of the Forest Service, one of the most important functions which they are called upon to perform, that of making periodical inspections of the records kept at the various forest supervisors' offices of the district, takes them away from their headquarters for periods of six to eight weeks each year. During these periods of absence their offices must continue to function without interruption, and one of the principal essentials toward accomplishing this is the presence in each office of a deputy authorized to sign official checks for the fiscal agent. Not only does the need for the services of a deputy arise during the absence of a fiscal agent from his station on official business but as well during his absence on annual or sick leave.

While the foregoing practice has been in effect in this department for a good many years, with the sanction of the accounting officers of the Government, the only legislative enactment specifically covering such contingencies is that contained in section 8 of the sundry civil appropriation act for the fiscal year 1910, approved March 4, 1909 (35 Stat. 1027), which authorizes the appointment of deputies for disbursing officers in the District of Columbia. In an opinion rendered on October 5, 1923, the Comptroller General decided that a similar arrangement with respect to the disbursing officers of the Army was not permissible. However, at the suggestion of the Secretary of War, the Comptroller General gave his consent, in so far as the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are concerned, to a continuation during the remainder of the current fiscal year (1924) of the practice which has heretofore obtained in those services of having disbursing officers' checks signed in the name of the disbursing officer by another officer or employee specifically designated by the head of the department to so sign with the consent of the disbursing officer and his surety. Under date of January 14, 1924, in response to a request by the Secretary of Agriculture, the Comptroller General granted a like privilege to this department. However, with the expiration of this suference on June 30, 1924, our field deputies must cease to act unless in the meantime an authorization is obtained from Congress.

In view of the obvious need for field deputies, to act in the place of regular fiscal or disbursing agents during periods of unavoidable absence of the latter from their headquarters, I trust that the inclosed bill will receive the favorable consideration of your committee.

Sincerely yours,

HENRY C. WALLACE, *Secretary.*

H. R. 8372 as originally introduced was identical to the bill reported herewith. H. R. 8372 was referred to the Secretary of the Treasury for his opinion. The Secretary of the Treasury replied, submitting a substitute bill, which substitute was reported as a committee amendment to H. R. 8372 in lieu of the matter originally contained in the bill. The substitute extended these provisions to all the departments in the Government and changed existing law. The committee amendment was adopted and the bill passed by the House and the bill as amended and passed is now before the Senate Committee on Finance. It is proposed now to pass the bill reported herewith, which will apply only to the Department of Agriculture, and will relieve the situation there.